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Recommendation to remove the Somali Bee-eater *Merops revoilii* from the Tanzania list

Britton (1980) admitted the Somali Bee-eater to the Tanzania list on the basis of a single record "One seen 10 km north of Dar es Salaam on 22 November 1970". Although not referenced this surely refers to Harvey (1970) who claimed a single bird at salt pans north of Dar es Salaam in November 1970 (cited again in Harvey & Howell 1987).

There have been no further records from Tanzania despite considerable fieldwork in Mkomazi National Park during the early 1990s (Lack *et al.* 1999) and many occasional visits by birdwatchers since. There are 4,821 bird records for Mkomazi from the 882,000 on the Tanzania Bird Atlas database covering every month of the year (www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com). Although Archer (1979) documented a southward expansion of range in the Tsavo area of Kenya in the late 1960s and early 1970s there is no evidence that this has continued (Brian Finch, *pers. comm.*): "In April 2008, I found a pair [of Somali Bee-eaters] behaving as if nesting on the road in Tsavo West National Park, about 20 km from Maktau Gate on to the Taveta-Voi Road. I would imagine that this is barely 40

km in a direct line to the [Tanzanian] border, and probably quite a bit less..... Apart from these odd records towards the Tanzania border, there is no evidence that the bird has any post-breeding dispersal."

There are two suggested possibilities regarding the origin of Harvey's claim of the species in Dar es Salaam. One is that it was an escaped or released bird from holding grounds of the nefarious bird trade, some of which were situated north of Dar es Salaam in the early 1970s. However, this seems unlikely as there are no records of trade in this species, and no indication that trappers were operating in the north-eastern part of the country. The second (more likely) possibility is that this was simply an identification error for a pale washed-out immature Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus*, especially because both show a pale blue rump. This dry area to the north of Dar es Salaam is on the northern edge of the range of *M. hirundineus* and post breeding dispersal of immature birds could be expected in this part of the country. The Somali Bee-eater is not illustrated in the only field guide available in 1970 (Williams 1963) and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater is not illustrated in the handbook (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1952).

It is most unlikely that this semi-desert species could occur naturally near Dar es Salaam, some 350 km south of its known range. This species is not migratory, it is not known to wander extensively, and it would have had to cross hundreds of kilometres of unfamiliar and seemingly unsuitable habitat as well as negotiate the West and East Usambara Mountains. Thus, it is recommended that this species is removed from the Tanzania list for now.

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